

Conservation Lands—Town, Private, and State

Conserved lands in Fitzwilliam provide protection for a variety of natural resources. Encompassed in these tracts of lands are forest, riparian areas, ponds, streams, and wetlands. These lands protect habitat areas that shelter both migratory species and native plants and animals. The most consistent tree species found in these tracts of lands are hardwoods with stands of coniferous forest intermingled. Geological topography varies from steep slopes with rocky outcrops to wetlands that are low lying with very poor drainage features.

These ecological protected tracts make a vital contribution to the town's aesthetic appeal and shield large areas of lands from potential development. They are also recreation resources for walking, bird watching, canoeing, etc. Conservation of watershed areas provides for the protection of ground water aquifers and surface water such as ponds, streams, marshlands, swamps, and other wetlands.

Town Lands

The first Town Forests were established at the annual Town Meeting in 1993. The voters authorized the Conservation Commission to manage these forests which included four lots. The following is a brief description of the largest tracts of Fitzwilliam's publicly owned conserved town lands.

Holman Meadow

This 9.5 acre lot lies west of Royalston Road, south of Route 119 West. The land is mostly flat. This property was previously used for agriculture, but now is entirely wetlands. The Holman family used it as a hay field and grew corn for livestock. A brook running from Horseshoe or Boyce Pond on the easterly side of Royalston Road bisects the property. Beavers dammed the brook and caused extensive flooding which makes the land useless for agriculture. The Holman family donated the land to the town in 1989. The land could be used for nature studies.

Gaseau Property

This tract lies in the easterly section of Fitzwilliam between Routes 12 and 119. There are 125.5 acres which border Scott Brook as it travels between the two highways. The land is mostly flat and is entirely wetland. Scott Brook is fairly deep here and winds through beautiful wildlife habitat. The brook is easily navigated by canoe and is a prime spot for viewing small wildlife and birds. In addition, the property offers a spectacular view of Mount Monadnock. The property was not suitable for building, and Mr. Gaseau donated it to the Town of Fitzwilliam in 1994.

Katie Metzger Town Forest

The Old Town Forest was given to the town by the Whitcomb family in 1977 and was officially designated as a town forest in 1992. The property consisted of 69 acres which lie north of Route 119 and is entirely forested. The land is hilly and rocky with mostly hardwood and some hemlock.

The Katie Metzger Town Forest was purchased by the town in 2002. In 2008 it was officially established as a town forest. Much of the 175-acre property was logged before the purchase.

This town forest now combines two pieces of adjacent, town-owned conserved property, the Old Town Forest and the property originally called the Katie Metzger Town Forest. They were combined in 2005. The whole is now called the Katie Metzger Town Forest and has a total of 244 acres.

Widow Gage Town Forest

This 59 acre property lies in the northwest section of Fitzwilliam. The Widow Gage Road is a Class VI road that begins at the north end of Old Troy Road. The property lies on either side of this road. The land is very rocky and at one time was used for grazing sheep. Presently hardwood dominates the tract with a few apple trees near where the home site was located. The Metacomet-Monadnock Trail bisects the property 80 yards north of the home site. The beauty of this land lies in the secluded, peaceful setting and stone wall-lined hills.

The Fitzwilliam Hiking Trail Map “Little Monadnock-Widow Gage Loop,” published by the Fitzwilliam Conservation Commission, charts a hiking trail that travels through this property.

Holman Meadow



photo by D. A. Ibelle

Conserved Lands in Private Ownership

The following is a list of the seven private conservation easements in Fitzwilliam.

Meadowood Easement

In 1991 Mrs. Donald Holbrook granted an easement on two parts of her property on Upper Troy Road to the Monadnock Conservancy. The first is a parcel of 28.5 acres bordered by Upper Troy Road on the east and Rockwood Pond Road on the north. There is an old road along the south and west perimeters of this parcel that provides a delightful walking trail.

The second parcel included in the easement is a 4.5 acre piece which forms a strip of land along Bowker Pond between the pond and Mrs. Holbrook's house (M39, L3). The easement runs 947 feet along the pond and 200 feet back toward Upper Troy Road. Both parcels are heavily wooded. Wildlife identified on the property includes beaver, fox, deer, and ducks and geese in the pond.

Slavic Easement

This property is on the north side of Rhododendron Road and lies between the Rhododendron State Park and the top of Little Monadnock Mountain. The total acreage is 290 of which 196 are under easement held by the State of New Hampshire. It is 1.25 miles long and is half a mile wide at its widest point. A trail from the park to the summit runs along its northern border, and the tributaries to Kemp Brook, along with the brook itself, start on the property. The easement was given in 1987 by Rosalind and Fred Slavic to the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests, which then turned it over to the State.

There are wetlands, rocky ledges, and steep slopes, all heavily forested. Trees include pine, spruce, and hemlock among the softwoods and oak, beech, maple, birch, ash, and black cherry among the hardwoods. The property is maintained as a wildlife sanctuary and is posted against hunting. Hikers are welcome. F. S.

Lowe Easement

Within Fitzwilliam, right on the Fitzwilliam-Rindge town line, is a small 7-acre portion of a large 700-acre easement. The greatest portion of this easement, some 693 acres, lies in Rindge. Conserved for the preservation of open spaces, Arthur Lowe granted the easement to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests in 1993.

Rine Conservation Easement

The intent of this easement, conserved in 1996, is to manage and protect 20 acres located in the southeast section of the town north of Sip Pond. Its purpose is to protect its present natural scenic forested and open condition, and to protect and promote the conservation of forests, wetlands, natural watercourses, and wildlife. This easement is held by the New England Forestry Foundation Inc.

The Pinnacle

In 2001 the Shupacks donated an easement on the Pinnacle to the Monadnock Conservancy. This 108-acre parcel is located on Rhododendron and Flagg Roads. It was conserved primarily to protect surface water quality, to preserve wildlife habitat, and to offer continued use by the public of the extensive ski trails existing on the property. No commercial or industrial activities are allowed. Limited forestry and agricultural uses are permitted. The Fitzwilliam Trail Map "Pinnacle Hiking Trails," published by the Fitzwilliam Conservation Commission, charts these established trails.

Piper Hill Easement

In October of 2002, Richard and Jean Castle of 294 Rhododendron Road entered into a conservation easement of 97.5 acres with the Monadnock Conservancy. The property includes unimproved fields, forest lands, agricultural land, and wetlands for the primary protection of wildlife habitat, scenic views, and forestland. This conserved land includes riparian border along the Rockwood Stream and is located adjacent to Rhododendron State Park.

Tracie's Community Farm

In 2008, Fitzwilliam Green LLC granted to the Monadnock Conservancy a conservation easement on a 25.6-acre portion of the tract known as Elephant Rock Farm. This 25.6-acre property, consisting of fields, forest, and agricultural land, was then sold to Tracie Smith who now operates Tracie's Community Farm as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. On a CSA farm, shareholders either purchase a share or work on the farm to receive a portion of the produce.

State Parks and Lands

Most of the following description of Fitzwilliam lands that are New Hampshire state property was taken from the 1996 Inventory Natural Resources of Fitzwilliam.

Fitzwilliam Rail Trail

As highlighted in the Fitzwilliam Trail Map "Fitzwilliam Rail Trail," published by the Fitzwilliam Conservation Commission, this old railroad bed provides a variety of recreational activities. Approximately 12 miles long, it extends through the entire length of Fitzwilliam from north to south.

Grant State Forest

The State of New Hampshire also owns a small parcel of land consisting of 8 acres know as the Grant State Forest which is located in the southwestern corner of Fitzwilliam Most of the forest is located in the adjoining town of Richmond. This land has no legal access either by road or by a right of way within the town of Fitzwilliam.

A View of Grand Monadnock from the Ledges on Little Monadnock



photo by J. Ibelle

Rhododendron State Park

Fitzwilliam is lucky to have a large area which is protected from development, and is intended to remain forever wild. It is the area on and around Little Monadnock Mountain. It begins with the Rhododendron State Park, named for the remarkable stand of giant Rhododendrons, which are in full blossom in mid-summer and attracts visitors from all over the country. It also contains the Patch Cottage. This property has been declared a national historic site. The cottage formerly housed a park ranger during the summer.

The park contains some spectacular pine trees, as well as oaks and other hardwoods, all of which were saved from cutting in 1902 by Mary Ware of Rindge, New Hampshire, who bought the land and donated it to the State for a park. There are garden trails maintained by the Fitzwilliam Garden Club, and a trail that leads through an adjoining property to the top of Little Monadnock, and to a magnificent view of Grand Monadnock Mountain.

The Slavic easement, identified under the section “conserved land in private ownership,” lies between the park and the top of Little Monadnock, comprising most of the eastern slope of the mountain. The Slavics, owners of this property, gave the easement to protect it from timbering or development. Hunting is prohibited on the property, but hikers are welcome on the trail.

A stream at the bottom is surrounded by wetlands and hardwood forest. Further up the slope, pine, and hemlock take over, with an occasional spruce which tends to be larger and older. Large ledges provide dens and shelters for a variety of animals. In the spring and fall two rock lined brooks converge and form a waterfall.

Further up, the land is rugged and in places precipitous, with magnificent pines, spruce and hardwoods. The Metacomet-Monadnock Trail winds through it, leading to Mt. Monadnock. Near the top there are two ledges facing west from which the hills of Western New Hampshire and the Green Mountains of Vermont can be seen. The entire area is so heavily wooded that not a single house or road is visible, only an unbroken expanse of wooded hills and mountains. Except for the power line cut to the north, it looks as it must have looked to the Native Americans.

The summit itself is a bare rock outcropping ringed with wind-stunted trees and has no view. A round bronze marker set into the rock marks the official summit. The trail to the north passes through a grove of tall spruce and then opens to a rock ledge looking to the northeast to Rockwood Pond, and beyond, to big Monadnock. This is the terminus of the park trail and is a good spot for a picnic.

The combination of the Slavic easement and state ownership of the top of Little Monadnock protects the whole of Little Monadnock.

Private Easements

Property Name	Grantor	Easements Held By	Acres	Year
Bowker Pond Woodlands	Barbara Holbrook	Monadnock Conservancy	19.7	1992
Bowker Pond Shoreline	Barbara Holbrook	Monadnock Conservancy	4.1	1992
Lowe Easement	Arthur Lowe	Society for the Protection of the NH Forest	7	1993
Slavic Easement	Rosalind and Frederick Slavic	State of NH	196	1996
Rine Easement	Alexander Rine	New England Forestry Foundation Inc.	20	1996
Schupack Easement	Mel and Barbara Schupack	Monadnock Conservancy	108	2001
Piper Hill	Richard and Jean Castles	Monadnock Conservancy	97.5	2002
Tracie's Community Farm	Fitzwilliam Green LLC	Monadnock Conservancy	25.6	2008
Total Private Easement Acres			477.9	

Public Lands

Property Name	Owned By	Acres
Rhododendron State Park	State of NH	294
Top of Little Monadnock	State of NH	277
Grant State Forest	State of NH	8
Rail Trail	State of NH	115
Gaseau Property	Town of Fitzwilliam	125.5
Katie Metzger Town Forest	Town of Fitzwilliam	244
Widow Gage Town Forest	Town of Fitzwilliam	59
Holman Meadow	Town of Fitzwilliam	9.5
Emerson School surrounding land includes sports field and nature trail	Monadnock Regional School District	27
Total Government Acres		1,159

Recommendations

- As voted and approved at the annual 2007 town meeting, convey conservation easements to the Monadnock Conservancy to assure permanent enforceable protection for the Fitzwilliam Town Forests. The town will retain ownership.
- Develop and include in the town's master plan a conservation or open space plan including evaluating and targeting parcels that will protect land with significant conservation value. The 2009 Conservation Guideline worksheet will be a useful evaluation tool.
- Establish an open space committee to develop and implement an open space plan.
- Identify unfragmented open space blocks including land contiguous with other towns.
- Require an environmental impact assessment to assess the potential impact that is site specific if proposed projects may have an impact on the natural resource diversity or may be part of another conservation plan, i.e. NH Wildlife Action Plan. The 2009 NRI Conservation Guidelines will be a useful tool to help in the assessment of proposed plans to safeguard areas of significant value.
- Investigate the possibility of posting informational signs at each of the above named town lands.

Tables and maps locating the features in Fitzwilliam Town Lands:

- A) Trail maps developed by the Conservation Commissions, available at the town hall and library.
- B) Conservation map with primary Protection Agency designation.
- C) Pictures of Conservation Town Land sites.

Resources

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